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International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with a request made by the General Assembly in resolution 66/193. It provides a status report on the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report outlines the progress made in accelerating the development of the Semipalatinsk region[1] between 2011 and 2013, through programmes and actions organized by the Government of Kazakhstan and the international community, including United Nations agencies.

2. The Semipalatinsk test site, also known as "the Polygon", was the primary nuclear test site of the Soviet Union. In total, 456 nuclear tests were conducted between 1949 and 1989 at Semipalatinsk, including 340 underground and 116 atmospheric explosions. Altogether, nuclear explosions at Semipalatinsk were the equivalent of over 2,500 Hiroshima bombs. The Soviet Union had other nuclear test sites, but this was the only one close to major settlements. The resulting fallout from such tests severely affected the ecosystems of the region and the traditional way of life of its inhabitants.

3. The closure of the Semipalatinsk test site launched a new stage in the process of global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. President Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan are to be commended for their leadership in the global nuclear disarmament process, including the closure of the Semipalatinsk site on 29 August 1991, and the decision to renounce voluntarily the fourth largest nuclear arsenal in the world. The Government of Kazakhstan has achieved much since 2011 in the sphere of nuclear non-proliferation: in 2011, Kazakhstan hosted the International Forum for a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World and in 2012, it launched the international ATOM (Abolish Testing. Our Mission) project. As part of that project, anyone worldwide who stands against nuclear weapons can sign a petition online for presentation to Governments, calling for a complete ban on nuclear testing and helping to facilitate the early adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. In addition, in 2012, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) agreed to deploy the first international nuclear fuel bank in Kazakhstan and the Presidents of Kazakhstan, the United States of America and the Russian Federation adopted a joint statement on trilateral cooperation at the former Semipalatinsk test site. In 2013, Kazakhstan hosted two rounds of talks between Iran and the P5+1 countries (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States).

4. In 2009, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 64/35 designating 29 August as the International Day against Nuclear Tests — a symbolic date, which was the first date of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk test site and the date on which the site finally closed.

5. Shortly after closing the site in 1991, Kazakhstan began helping the population of the affected territories in the East Kazakhstan region, aiding their recovery from the devastating consequences of nuclear explosions through social protection and health-care interventions. The General Assembly adopted seven resolutions between 1997 and 2011 (52/169, 53/1, 55/44, 57/101, 60/216, 63/279, and 66/193) calling on donor States and international development organizations to support the efforts of Kazakhstan to improve the social, economic and environmental situation in the Semipalatinsk region.

[1] The city of Semipalatinsk was renamed Semey in 2007.

6. Acknowledging the progress made in accelerating the development of the Semipalatinsk region between 2008 and 2011 through programmes and actions organized by the Government of Kazakhstan and the international community, including United Nations agencies, in 2011, the General Assembly adopted resolution 66/193. In that resolution, the Assembly urged the international community to assist Kazakhstan in formulating and implementing special programmes and projects for the treatment and care of the affected population and in its efforts to ensure economic growth and sustainable development in the Semipalatinsk region, including increasing the effectiveness of existing programmes. The Assembly also called upon the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region and report to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session on the progress made in implementing resolution 66/193.

7. The present report, accordingly, summarizes the actions taken since 2011 in the Semipalatinsk region by the Government of Kazakhstan, the United Nations and the international community.

II. Economic and social conditions

8. In its national vision and strategies, Kazakhstan has embraced the ambitious objective of becoming one of the 30 most developed countries. It is currently an upper-middle-income country, with steadily increasing gross domestic product per capita that has grown from $1,500 in 1998 to nearly $13,000 in 2013. Meanwhile, in recent years, the share of the population living in poverty, as measured by the national poverty line, has fallen from 5.5 per cent in 2011 to 3.8 per cent in 2012. That is a significant improvement over the 47 per cent of the population officially registered as living in poverty in 2001.

9. Although standards of living in Kazakhstan have risen significantly over the last decade, socioeconomic disparities remain significant between regions, rural and urban areas and women and men, in terms of access to services and opportunities. Living standards in rural areas remain much lower than those in urban areas and many social, regional and health disparities have yet to be erased. A number of social and health indicators do not yet correspond with the impressive level of economic development.

10. Kazakhstan has made good progress regarding the Millennium Development Goals. It has achieved Goals 1 to 3 ahead of time and has adopted a "Millennium Development Goals plus" agenda. It has made considerable strides in reducing child and maternal mortality, reducing the latter almost five-fold to 12.6 per 100,000 live births in 2013 (the target for 2015 had been 14), thus meeting Goal 5. Child mortality fell by 65 per cent between 1990 and 2012 from 54.1 per 1,000 live births to 18.7, indicating that Kazakhstan should achieve Goal 4 ahead of time. However, the country recognizes that particular targets have yet to be achieved, including some indicators for Goals 6 and 7, and that more efforts are needed to work on the unfinished Millennium Development Goals agenda.

11. As of 1 January 2014, over 962,000 people have been registered in East Kazakhstan as victims of nuclear testing at Semipalatinsk. The population today is economically vibrant, with great industrial potential and a strong agricultural sector. While notable progress has been made in respect of several economic and social

indicators, more remains to be done. In 2012, 3.4 per cent of the population in the region had an income below the subsistence minimum, compared to the national average of 3.8 per cent.

12. Between 2009 and 2012, the region saw child mortality among children under five fall from 23.4 per 1,000 live births to 18.2 (against the national average of 16.2). Between 2010 and 2013, infant mortality rates fell from 20.7 per 1,000 live births to 12.6. Meanwhile, the maternal mortality ratio fell by 60 per cent from 22.4 per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 13.1 in 2013.

13. Life expectancy at birth in the region stood at 68.6 years in 2012, just below the national average of 69.6, while women's life expectancy at 73.97 years significantly surpassed that of men at 63.31 years.

III. Institutional framework for assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

14. On 17 April 2014, the Government of Kazakhstan endorsed measures to improve social protection for victims of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk site. The plan comprises:

(a) A research programme entitled "Retrospective and prospective analysis of the medical and radio-ecological impact of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on the population of surrounding area";

(b) Promotion of sanitary-epidemiological expertise through the above-mentioned analysis;

(c) Presentation of research on various aspects of environmental pollution (air, water and soil) across the former test site, including pollution levels in agricultural products;

(d) Promotion of ecological expertise regarding possible State reclassification of the former test site;

(e) Planned amendments and additions to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated 18 December 1992 entitled "On the social protection of citizens affected by nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site" if reclassification of the test site is granted;

(f) Provision of consultative and diagnostic services by health specialists from the Karaganda and Pavlodar regions and from regional consultative and diagnostic centres to residents of the Karkarala district in the Karaganda region and of the Bayanaul, Lebyazhye, and May districts of the Pavlodar region;

(g) Provision of 10 kinds of preventive medical examination for child and adult residents of the Karkarala district of the Karaganda region, who may have been affected by nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk site;

(h) Establishment of the Republican Centre for Complex Dosimetry in the city of Kurchatov in the East Kazakhstan region;

(i) Establishment of a rehabilitation centre, offering 120 beds at the Institute of Radiation Medicine and Ecology in the city of Semey (formerly Semipalatinsk) in East Kazakhstan.

IV. Government programmes for the Semipalatinsk region

A. Health care

Retrospective and prospective analysis of the medical and radioecological impact of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on the population of surrounding areas

15. The Ministry of Health has been allocated 83.8 million tenge to conduct a study on Law No. 148-V on the republican budget for 2014-2016, dated 3 December 2013. The results of the study will guide the adaptation of current legislation concerning social support for victims of nuclear testing. The Research Institute of Radiation Medicine and Ecology has already implemented or initiated the following scientific and technical projects:

(a) At the request of the Ministry of Health, a project entitled "Methods of integrated medical and genetic indication and prevention of radiation-induced effects among descendants of persons exposed to radiation" (2010-2012);

(b) At the request of the Ministry of Health, jointly with the State Medical University of the city of Semey, a project entitled "Development of science-based technologies for minimizing environmental risk, to prevent adverse effects on the health of the population" (2012-2014);

(c) A pilot feasibility project, entitled "Prospective cohort study of residents near the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site" (2013-2015), implemented jointly with the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Creating the Republican Centre for Integrated Dosimetry in the city of Kurchatov

16. The Republican Centre for Integrated Dosimetry is being created as part of a State system to monitor and control the amount of radiation exposure experienced by personnel working with ionizing radiation sources and carrying out medical radiological procedures, as well as the amount of exposure suffered by the residents of the areas affected by nuclear testing. The centre will play a vital role in radiation safety for personnel and the wider public. It is being established as part of a programme to develop the atomic sector in Kazakhstan for the period from 2011 to 2014, with development prospects until 2020 (as approved by resolution No. 728 of the Government of Kazakhstan on 29 June 2011).

Creating a rehabilitation centre offering 120 beds, at the Research Institute of Radiation Medicine and Ecology, in the city of Semey

17. According to the Institute, about 360,000 people are at risk from radiation within the East Kazakhstan region. Their need for specialized medical care exceeds the medical capacity of the Institute several times.

B. Economic development

Transferring lands at the former Semipalatinsk test site for economic use

18. As part of the activities to secure the safety of the former Semipalatinsk test site within national budgetary programme No. 38 on "Securing radiation safety on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan", the National Nuclear Centre conducted an integrated ecological examination of the south-eastern part of the site between 2011 and 2013. The study covered an area of 2,500 km^2, including monitoring of the natural environment: soil and vegetable cover, water and air quality, fauna and agricultural products.

19. The exposure of the local population to radiation was assessed and 2,146.5 km^2 of land was recommended for full economic use, while 17.5 km^2 was not recommended for use (remaining part of the land reserves) and 336 km^2 being of limited use (for industry). Taking into account previous studies, over 30 per cent of the 6,060 km^2 that makes up the test site has now been examined. IAEA has approved the results as part of a joint technical cooperative study project entitled "Feasibility of economic use for the former Semipalatinsk test site".

C. Environment

Remediating polluted sites

20. To alleviate the effects of radiation at the test site, remediation (restoration) activities were carried out at sites polluted by radiation between 2011 and 2013. To restrict the distribution of radiation pollution from underground nuclear testing, reclamation works were conducted at six platform sites at Degelen, where maximum indicators of radioactive soil pollution were recorded. Clean soil was added over an area of 0.065 km^2 (6.5 ha) to a depth of 20 cm. That reduced surface radiation to 10 μSv/h, preventing the wind from spreading radioactive soil any further.

Creating the Republican Centre for processing and long-term storage of radioactive waste and ionizing radiation sources from atomic sector enterprises and other industries

21. The Republican Centre for processing and long-term storage of radioactive waste and ionizing radiation sources from atomic sector enterprises and other industries is being launched as part of the integrated development plan for Kurchatov Monocity in the East Kazakhstan region. It aims to make safe provision for the removal and recycling of highly radioactive liquid and solid waste, as well as promptly disassembling and recharging special-purpose installations and retired ampoule sources of ionizing radiation.

D. Education

22. To raise awareness and improve public knowledge regarding radioecology at the former test site, between 2011 and 2013 local residents (including schoolchildren and students) joined civil servants, tourists, foreign representatives, city visitors and media representatives on tours of the scientific and technical museum at the test site. In total, more than 3,000 people visited the museum over that period.

E. Joint programmes

23. In collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund, the Government of Kazakhstan is implementing a joint programme in the East Kazakhstan region entitled "Raising the competitiveness of the region through innovative approaches to regional planning and social services". It addresses the particular needs of vulnerable people in the cities of Semey, Kurchatov and Oskemen and other affected areas in region. Suffering from economic stagnation, Semey is now plagued by an underdeveloped social infrastructure and a deteriorating quality of health and social services. The project aims to ensure the provision of adequate health services, while encouraging local economic development through capacity-building of entrepreneurship and business skills and improving community mobilization. It also aims to promote volunteerism and support non-governmental and community-based organizations in providing community services in their role as agents of change within society. The following results of the joint programme and related government initiatives have been achieved to date:

(a) The Akimat (Office of the Regional Governor) of East Kazakhstan came first out of 16 offices assessed for efficiency in 2013 whereas in 2012, it came last;

(b) Five districts of East Kazakhstan have successfully implemented self-government initiatives, applying energy efficient technologies and acting as a model for other districts and regions;

(c) Infant mortality rates fell from 20.7 per 1,000 live births in 2010 to 12.6 per 1,000 in 2013. The road map for improvement in mother and child health services in East Kazakhstan was developed after barriers to accessing quality services had been identified. Eventually, the road map was incorporated into the State plan to reduce maternal and infant mortality for the period 2014-2017, with an annual budget of $5 million;

(d) East Kazakhstan has become a pioneer in promoting the well-being of children as part of its efforts to strengthen information systems at the local level. It is the first region in the country to establish a family support mechanism, helping vulnerable families and children overcome social exclusion, keeping children with their families and addressing issues of violence against children;

(e) Maternal mortality fell by 60 per cent from 22.4 per 1,000 live births in 2011 to 13.1 in 2013. That is attributed to the overall improvement in health care for mothers and children both in hospital and in the primary health-care system.

V. Donor assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

International Atomic Energy Agency

24. Between 2011 and 2013, two IAEA technical cooperation projects were implemented in East Kazakhstan: KAZ/9/011, "Supporting radioecological monitoring" for the period 2009-2011, completed in 2012, and KAZ/9/012, "Supporting the transferral of former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site territories to economic use", which began in 2012 and will run for four years.

25. As part of project KAZ/9/011, IAEA provided support to Kazakhstan in upgrading knowledge for monitoring, including hands-on training for two experts in 2011 for implementing an indoor radon monitoring programme. In 2011 and 2012, expert missions assisted in setting up the calibration of radon measuring equipment and data interpretation for assessing risks relating to excessive radon levels (measured against applicable standards). In 2011, IAEA also provided radon monitoring equipment and equipment for calibrating radon detectors.

26. Project KAZ/9/012 is based on the 2010 KAZ/7/002 initiative, entitled "Supporting assessment of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site territories for further economic use". The Agency is providing expert support for evaluating environmental studies of the former test site territory, training staff and providing equipment and materials for radiological measurement.

Government of Brazil

27. The Government of Brazil has financed a project, implemented by UNICEF, to promote a community-based approach to providing proper nutrition for children under the age of 5 ($93,460). That has raised the capacity of health-care providers in the field of infant and young child feeding (breastfeeding, and complementary/supplementary feeding), bringing improved counselling skills and practices, improved skills in the early identification of problems related to nutrition and more effective growth monitoring, focusing on the promotion of better nutritional practices for vulnerable infants and young children.

Government of Norway

28. The Government of Norway is supporting a UNICEF programme ($600,000) to develop a sustained and operational child protection mechanism to prevent and respond to child abuse, exploitation and family separation in line with international standards. It is contributing to the launch of an integrated approach to managing child protection issues in the Semipalatinsk region at the local level, including addressing violence against children, the independent monitoring of child rights and the prevention of child abandonment and institutionalization of those without parental care.

Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department of the European Commission

29. The Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department of the European Commission has worked jointly with UNICEF to implement a programme ($200,000) to strengthen the resilience of children living in areas exposed to disasters, improving school emergency preparedness and children's knowledge of disaster risk reduction measures, while enhancing appropriate skills. The programme also encourages children to bring their concerns to the authorities regarding urban development, natural disasters and the consequences of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear tests for public health.

United States Agency for International Development

30. In the Semipalatinsk region, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has funded its TB CARE I project, strengthening protocols for managing multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis and improving the coordination of general and prison tuberculosis services, while helping develop infection control

plans at tuberculosis facilities in the Semipalatinsk region and procuring the necessary equipment. Within TB CARE I, a number of national and regional training programmes have been undertaken, including for health officers from the city of Semey. The project is scheduled to end in December 2014.

31. Under a Development Credit Authority initiative, USAID supports a residential energy efficiency housing programme in cooperation with the Asian Credit Fund. The programme focuses on rural areas of the Semipalatinsk region and, by the end of 2013, had implemented 47 projects, including 28 for residential building insulation (worth 14.5 million tenge) and 19 for rehabilitation of residential heat supply systems (9.9 million tenge).

Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency

32. Between 2009 and 2012, UNDP implemented a project of its "Growing inclusive markets" initiative funded by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. It was part of a regional initiative to encourage businesses to engage with the poorer end of society as clients and customers, as well as in their role of producers, employees and business owners. The aims of the project were to foster long-term sustainable development and raise awareness across the country of inclusive business models and market approaches. This was carried out by producing and disseminating a report featuring inclusive business model case studies from the region and by presenting the key barriers to achieving more inclusive markets alongside solutions for the problem. The country component was based in East Kazakhstan.

33. The primary target of achieving five successfully brokered inclusive investment projects was met; in fact, six projects were initiated a waste management project; a retail union; a syrmak (felt rug) making project; a project to assemble and service wheelchairs; a wool collection project; and a milk collection project (the latter as yet only in the monitoring stage, rather than implemented). They have created 20 jobs and will have additional indirect impacts (e.g. the milk collection feasibility study in the Zhitikara district estimated that 2,875 people would potentially benefit).

Government of Finland

34. Between 2009 and 2013, UNDP implemented a project entitled "Wider Europe: aid for trade in countries across Central Asia, South Caucasus and Western CIS", funded by the Government of Finland, which was a component of a larger initiative aimed at supporting inclusive growth in the region through the promotion of trade and the enhancement of the competitiveness of each country. It aimed to support the efforts of the countries concerned to reduce poverty and improve peoples' lives. Activities in the Semipalatinsk region focused on supporting the business initiatives of vulnerable groups and start-up businesses, in order to promote trade and employment. In addition, those activities were aligned with the current development strategy 2020 of the Government of Kazakhstan's, especially in the area of strengthening the capacity of small and medium enterprises, promoting the business environment and establishing an institutional setting to stimulate the private sector and export-related promotional measures.

35. As a result, 13 business consultancy providers and 32 online centres were established around the area; 9,052 owners of small businesses received training and

consultancy services; and grants were made to support 18 business plans via other funding sources, including the programmes of the Government of Kazakhstan entitled "Road map for business 2020" and "Employment 2020", with total funding amounting to 98.91 million tenge ($543,222). With financial support for inclusive and innovative business projects for micro and small businesses, the grant programme was worth $100,000. Under the "Road map for business 2020" programme, 16 business projects were approved and two business projects cofinanced; six projects were cofinanced under the "Employment 2020" programme and eight were fully financed by State programmes. As a result of the grant programme, 83.867 million tenge ($548,875) was attracted from State programmes.

VI. Priorities for future action

36. The Government of Kazakhstan, with the assistance of donors and the direct involvement of United Nations agencies, has carried out a considerable amount of work in the Semipalatinsk region over recent years. Numerous projects in the socioeconomic sphere and in the areas of environment, public health and education have been implemented. However, a lot remains to be done.

37. While significant efforts have been made within the framework of State, sectoral and regional programmes, as well as with international assistance, a more comprehensive and coherent approach is needed to alleviate the problems of the region.

38. The local development programme, run by United Nations agencies in the region, shows that harmonization of donor assistance to support current government priorities, coupled with active civil society support, is creating a good foundation for rehabilitation of the nuclear legacy and for general development. Nevertheless, more investment will be required in human development over the coming years, in order to ensure a stable pattern of development and growth for the region. To achieve this objective, governmental and international efforts will focus on the following priorities:

(a) Strengthening the health management system in the region to enable mother and child primary health-care services to identify and support vulnerable groups;

(b) Strengthening the capacity of local authorities, particularly in rural areas, in the use of evidence-based decision-making;

(c) Improving child and youth protection mechanisms by strengthening justice for children, preventing violence against children, promoting disaster risk preparedness, supporting vulnerable families with children and increasing the resilience of adolescents and young people in the face of associated risks;

(d) Promoting community awareness of the equal rights of vulnerable groups as an integral part of society;

(e) Increasing the efficiency of planning and the use of State resources in socioeconomic programmes at the local level, to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups;

(f) Capacity development to improve public well-being and further develop local self-governance;

(g) Enhancing access to quality social and economic services for vulnerable groups, including women and children;

(h) Providing the public with quality information on well-being and health.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

39. The Semipalatinsk test site has become a symbol of nuclear disarmament and hope for a nuclear-free world. It hosted the signing of an agreement on the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia and there is every reason to believe that we may eliminate nuclear weapons, realizing the hope born in Semipalatinsk.

40. Work in the region has brought together various agencies with Member States and local communities, demonstrating that the task of regional rehabilitation is too huge to be conducted alone. Joint efforts from the international community are essential to the economic and social development of the Semipalatinsk region and are an excellent example of United Nations organizations and national partners joining forces to address complex regional issues. Streamlining the United Nations contribution through one joint programme has made it possible to address an array of issues, from maternity health to local development and citizen participation. The Secretary-General calls on the international community to support the joint work of the Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations by:

(a) Enhancing the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the region, especially in rural areas, with the aim of reducing their stigmatization and isolation and promoting their integration into the community;

(b) Strengthening coordination among various actors in the region to plan, implement and monitor inclusive regional social programmes and services, with special attention paid to vulnerable groups.

41. A nuclear-free world is a common goal to which humanity should aspire. The Secretary-General takes this opportunity to remind the world once again of the tragic consequences of nuclear testing and to encourage the global community to support the Government of Kazakhstan in accelerating the development of the Semipalatinsk region. Only by acting together, can the world be made a safer and better place.